Finstall First School

Policy on Children Absconding (leaving the site without permission)

Finstall First School takes the safeguarding and care of its pupils very seriously and understands its duty to take reasonable steps to provide a safe, secure environment for children, staff and visitors. The School also takes reasonable steps to ensure that pupils remain within the care of the School at all times during the School day.

All children are formally registered twice each day, once at the start of the School day and again after lunch break has ended. The school provides perimeter fencing and external gates that are kept locked, other than at certain times of the School day to allow access for parents. When there is a trip off-site, it is the responsibility of the staff accompanying the trip to ensure that regular registers and head-counts take place (See Educational Visits Policy).

Children, parents and staff share responsibility for the children’s safety and security whilst on the premises. School staff regularly educate the children as to the reasons why it is unsafe for them to leave the site, without permission. Should we experience an absconding incident, we would again reinforce to the whole School why this kind of behaviour is so dangerous and is unacceptable. We expect parents to also reinforce this before their child starts School and throughout their School life, just as parents educate their child(ren) about how to stay safe when they are under their own care. The children, in turn, must also take responsibility for their own safety, including not leaving the site without permission. Reasonable adjustments will be made with regard to pupils who have particular needs (e.g. SEN / Behavioural / Emotional issues). The children are also taught that they are collectively responsible for each other and that they should always report incidents of poor or dangerous behaviour (including pupils absconding) to a member of staff immediately.

The School is not, and should not, resemble a prison and is not designed to prevent a child who is determined to leave the School from doing so. This is because other rules and regulations, which are also linked to the safeguarding of children, also have to be met. For example, all external doors are designed so that they can be easily opened from the inside in case there was a fire in the building.

The children are always well supervised during their time at School. However, due to the nature of the School environment and the workings of the School, each individual child is not **directly** supervised at **all** **times** during the School day. There are many occasions when the children are not directly supervised, on an individual basis, and are trusted to be sensible and to keep themselves safe by not taking the opportunity to leave the site.

For example:

* Leaving a lesson to go to the toilet
* Performing a task such as returning the register to the School office
* Taking work to show the Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher
* Visiting the Head Teacher for a Birthday sticker
* Going to or from an intervention group, a music lesson or to work with a parent helper
* Being supervised in the outside play areas along with large numbers of other children\*

Thus, at such times, children are trusted to behave in a way that will keep themselves safe by not leaving the site.

\*At lunch times, we have far more lunch time supervisors employed than is typical for a School of our size. However, their role is not a static one and they are not employed to guard the boundaries of the School. They are there to support the pupils, to help them to resolve any issues and to care for children who have hurt themselves e.g. falling over.

Actions to be taken when a child is found to be missing from School

If a child absconds from School, it could be some time before anyone realises that he / she is missing. As soon as a pupil, who was earlier registered as present, is found to be missing from School, the following procedures should be followed:

The Class Teacher should immediately ask the office staff to check that the child does not have another commitment – e.g. music lesson, external appointment, etc. If not, the member of Staff must inform the Head Teacher, or in his / her absence, the most senior member of staff present on that day.

That person:

a) organises other staff to search buildings and known places within School that the pupil may have gone to and to check the perimeter of the site;

b) organises for someone to contact the police;

c) organises for someone to contact the missing child’s parents to inform them of the situation;

d) organises for someone to search any known locations beyond the school boundary. Any staff leaving the School grounds should take a mobile phone to maintain contact.

Actions to be taken when a child insists on leaving the premises

If a child insists on leaving the premises with the knowledge of the Staff and cannot be persuaded by them to stay on premises, parents will be contacted immediately.

If appropriate, and enough Staff are available to enable one to leave the Premises with a mobile phone, they will follow from a “non-threatening distance” and observe where the child is going.

If there are not enough Staff to leave the premises to observe the child the Head Teacher, or most senior member of staff present on that day, may decide that the child is unsafe and call the police.

If it is thought that the child may be a danger to himself or others, then reasonable force to return the child to the School premises should be used (Please refer to the School’s Positive Handling Policy).

Once a situation involving a child leaving the School site without permission has been resolved, a written record of the incident should be made as soon after the incident as practicable and placed in the pupils’ confidential record. Risk assessments and appropriate policies will be reviewed and any necessary amendments made.

Actions to be taken on the child’s return to School

Should a child leave the site without permission, first and foremost the child is putting him or herself in danger. In addition, this is a **serious** breach of trust and a clear flouting of school rules, school expectations and the expectations of parents.

Before the child returns to School on the next School day, the Head Teacher or, in his / her absence, another Senior Leader will meet with parents to discuss the following:

1. To attempt to gain an understanding of why the child wanted to leave the School
2. To assess the risk of the child repeating this behaviour
3. To gain some reassurance from parents that they will reinforce to the child why this behaviour must not be repeated
4. To agree the measures that the School will take in the short / long term – e.g. the level of additional supervision that the child will require or any changes to site security;
5. To explain to the parents the consequences that will be applied in School to reinforce to the child why this behaviour must not be repeated. The consequences are likely to involve a period of time when the child is not allowed in environments where individual supervision is reduced, such as those listed on page 1. The severity of the consequences will depend on the age and the individual circumstances of the child (e.g. Children with SEND, LAC or issues that may affect their emotional well-being either within or outside of School) and the outcomes of the discussion with parents.

Until such a meeting has taken place, the child will remain directly supervised at all times and will not be allowed outside at play times or lunch times and will not be allowed on off-site visits.

Once such decisions have been agreed, staff and parents will arrange to meet again, at an agreed point in the future, to review the arrangements.

Should the child leave the School, without permission, again, this process will be repeated but the consequences will be more severe and additional measures will be applied as appropriate. Support may also be sought, in liaison with parents, from external agencies such as Early Intervention Family Support, School Attendance Officer, Educational Psychologist, etc.

This policy was written in consultation with staff, parents, children and governors and was approved by governors at the meeting of the full Governing body on: Wednesday 1st March 2017

This policy will be reviewed in: February 2020